



# DIVE INTO SWIMMING

## 10 Tips to Optimize Workouts

by Jim Thornton

**S**wimming may be the perfect lifelong sport; it's a low-impact, joint-friendly, sustainable way for anyone to stay fit at any age. In taking the plunge—including after a prolonged hiatus—be wisely aware of some caveats.

✓ Allow for relevant muscles to get into swim-shape. Endurance training increases their ability to use oxygen and nutrients more efficiently.

✓ Although swimming generally boasts low injury rates, avoid overdoing it. For the first month, concentrate on refining proper technique, including minimizing drag. Intense workouts can come later.

Here are 10 ways to optimize a swimming workout.

**1 Make Like a Missile.** With hands alongside the body, push off the wall underwater and glide until coming to a stop. Next, try it with arms outstretched about shoulder-width apart and the head tilted slightly upward like Superman flying. Then, repeat while contorting the body into the longest, straightest, thinnest shape possible. Overlap hands, extend arms and fingertips overhead to the max, squeeze biceps over ears with the head down. After pushing off, bring legs together with knees straight and toes pointed to eliminate any rudder effect.

**2 Look Down.** Keep the head down with eyes trained on the lane line, reducing drag and strain on the neck and lower back.

**3 Roll with It.** A good side-to-side body roll cuts drag and activates core muscles in powering arm pulls. Practice rolling by extending the right arm forward as far as possible, place the left arm flat against the torso, then push off the wall with the left shoulder pointing upward, the right, at the pool bottom. Maintain this position while kicking eight to 10 times. Then pull the right arm through the water, simultaneously rolling to the opposite side. Then extend the left arm forward and repeat.

When pulling, concentrate on directing power straight back. Pushing down on the water squanders energy during the onset of the stroke, as does pushing upward during the final phase. It eliminates bobbing.

**4 Control Hands.** Keep hands about shoulder-width apart throughout a freestyle pull. To avoid fishtailing from side-to-side, imagine a vertical line separating two halves of the body and don't allow hands to cross over it.

**5 Don't Kick Hard.** A good freestyle kick helps maintain balance and positioning to increase speed. Avoid over-kicking; small, quick kicks generate almost as much force as large, powerful ones and

Learn more from two-time Olympian Chloe Sutton, at [Tinyurl.com/ChloeSuttonFreestyleHelp](http://Tinyurl.com/ChloeSuttonFreestyleHelp).

with less drag. Point toes, keep knees fairly straight and try to keep legs within the torso's slipstream.

**6 Loosen Ankles.** Efficiency is more about ankle flexibility than foot size. If taking up swimming after years of land sports, ankles may be tight and inflexible. Wearing swim fins will loosen them up.

**7 Seek Quiet.** Make each stroke smooth and "fish-slippery". Practice swimming quietly. Splashing and thrashing wastes energy.

**8 Follow the 10 Percent Rule.** The three basic components of swim training are the duration, intensity and frequency of workouts. Seek to increase one component by 10 percent each week; for example, work on duration first and intensity later.

A reasonable goal for most swimmers is to reach three to four sessions a week of 40 to 60 minutes each. Ascertain what's sustainable for the long term. Once a routine is established, add in short, fast swims, alternating bursts of speed with rest

on a one-to-one ratio, such as 30 seconds of sprinting followed by 30 seconds of rest, repeated eight times.

**9 Take Tomorrow Off.** Rest days enable physical gains, especially as we age. For collegiate swimmers, two practices a day, six days a week might be normal. For retirees, four, one-hour swim practices per week can help preserve fitness safely.

**10 Team Up.** Coaching and instruction are available for all ages and abilities at many YMCA and recreation centers; check U.S. Masters Swimming at [usms.org/club-resources](http://usms.org/club-resources). Learning with others helps keep us motivated.

*Jim Thornton, of Sewickley, PA, swam for the University of Michigan in 1970, took a 15-year break, and then resumed competing through U.S. Masters Swimming in 1984. He's placed in the top 10 nationally 96 times in different events and age groups. In 2012, he placed first worldwide in the 200-meter freestyle for ages 60 to 64.*



by Marlaina Donato

**Stay Hydrated.** Even in water, we perspire, and a mere 2 percent dehydration can affect muscle performance. Even slight dehydration leads to water absorption during swimming and in turn, considerable amounts of chlorine or salt.

- Sip water every 15 to 20 minutes during a swimming session
- Drink water within 30 minutes after swimming for optimum rehydration
- Avoid sugary sports drinks; opt for filtered water

**Rinse off.** Due to chlorine's magnetic alkaline composition and healthy skin and hair's natural acidity, soaping up doesn't remove it. To outwit the chemical bond and reestablish a healthy pH balance after exposure to chlorinated or salt water:

- Shower before swimming to protect skin from excessive absorption of chemicals.
- Apply coconut or olive oil before swimming to moisturize and maintain pH to fend off viruses and bacteria.
- Shower immediately after swimming; start with warm-hot water to open the pores and finish with a cooling spray to close them.
- Add a few jar capfuls of apple cider vinegar to water and rinse hair and skin thoroughly; the vinegar's acidity breaks the chemical bond between chlorine and skin/hair, restores pH and prevents skin and hair damage.
- Wash hair and skin with sulphate-free, antioxidant shampoo and body wash. Check out [GoodbyeChlorine.com](http://GoodbyeChlorine.com).

## MINDFUL BENEFITS

According to studies by neuroscientist Sara Lazar, Ph.D., at Harvard Medical School, being mindful can affect stronger neural connections in the brain, effecting better breath control, improved concentration, less anxiety and enhancing our capacity to be in the moment.

- Notice the sensation of water on skin and a feeling of weightlessness.
- Forget about to-dos and indulge in simple floating; surrender to the support of the water and let go.
- Visualize the water washing away worries and stresses.
- Push off the wall of a pool or the bottom of a lake with a personal affirmation such as "I am peaceful" or "I open myself to joy."

Clean waters are vital to us all. Do your part by not contributing to overburdened natural resources.

- Swim in chlorine-free pools.
- Enjoy the beauty and pass on appreciation for special spots.
- Take out what we bring in.
- Learn more about why we need clean waterways at [NaturalAwakeningsMag.com/Green-Living-Archive/We-Need-Clean-Waters](http://NaturalAwakeningsMag.com/Green-Living-Archive/We-Need-Clean-Waters) and chlorine-free and natural pools at [NaturalAwakeningsMag.com](http://NaturalAwakeningsMag.com).